

ELEVENTH

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

DIRECTORS AND PHYSICIAN

OF

JAMES MURRAY'S

Royal Asylum for Lunatics.


1838.

PERTH:

PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE DIRECTORS,

BY DAVID DRON.

1838.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
Wellcome Library

<https://archive.org/details/b30317162>

ELEVENTH
ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
DIRECTORS AND PHYSICIAN
OF
JAMES MURRAY'S
ROYAL ASYLUM FOR LUNATICS.
JUNE 1838.

THE Report of last year commenced with a detail of the destructive fire which occurred in the Asylum on the 9th of May, 1837, by which the roof, and a great part of the interior of the building were consumed. It was then anticipated that the house would be again restored to its original condition in the course of a year. The Directors and Physician are now happy to report, that, in accordance with these anticipations, notwithstanding the delays occasioned by the unusual inclemency of the past season, the whole building is again almost complete. Not

only will it now possess all its former comfort and neatness, but many important improvements, which the occurrence of the fire suggested, have been effected. In particular, it will be remembered that, originally, the upper flat of the building was not fire-proof, and that the whole roof was one uninterrupted series. Now, however, not merely has the upper flat been, like those below, rendered fire-proof, but also the roof has been subdivided by gable walls; thereby interrupting the communication. Every other precaution which could be suggested has been adopted, under the advice of Mr. Burn, the Architect, by which almost the very possibility of a second accident by fire is excluded, or, at all events, if such an accident *should* occur, the fire must be circumscribed to a very limited space.

The Directors have also much pleasure in announcing, that, at Martinmas last, they got possession of the grounds surrounding the Asylum, by purchase from the Earl of Kinnoull. These extend to thirty-six imperial acres, and, of course, form a very valuable addition to the property of the Institution, which now has nearly fifty imperial acres attached. There is thus provided the most ample scope for the proper employment of the patients, and for affording them every variety of healthy employment, as well as recreation and exercise, in the open air;

than which nothing is found more conducive to their rapid and permanent recovery. The Directors have placed the land under the management of a special committee of gentlemen skilled in agriculture, and who not merely direct as to its proper management, but check every item of expenditure connected therewith. By this arrangement, there is established the most efficient control over this part of the affairs of the Institution. The attention of the weekly committee is thus still limited to their original duties; and the Superintendent is not encumbered with any charge or responsibility that might interfere with his more important duties in the management of the house and patients. So far as this arrangement has hitherto gone, the Directors have had every reason to be satisfied.

At last annual meeting, a committee was appointed to make inquiries concerning the appointment of a Chaplain to the Institution, and to report to the General Meeting of Directors, to be held in September thereafter. The committee, after corresponding with the asylums of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, and Aberdeen, in which chaplains have for years been employed, came, on mature deliberation, to the unanimous opinion that such an appointment would be highly expedient and advantageous to the Insti-

tution. The meeting gave effect to the recommendation of the committee, and remitted to them to prepare regulations, in terms of the report; and, at the next General Meeting, on the 11th December thereafter, the Reverend John Bell, Chaplain to the Right Hon. Lord Gray, was unanimously elected to the office of Chaplain of the Asylum, for one year from Whitsunday 1838. He has now commenced his labours, and his appointment seems to be extremely acceptable to the patients generally. The Directors are unwilling that any arrangement which may contribute to their temporal or future welfare should be wanting; and it is hoped that the most salutary results will, under the blessing of Providence, follow this appointment.

The Directors have, during the present year, been annoyed by an attempt, on the part of the Tax-office, to subject the Institution in taxes upon the windows of the building, as well as upon the keepers, who are now charged as male-servants. Although the Institution has now existed for eleven years, this is the first attempt which has been made, by any official connected with the Tax-office, to subject it in taxes. It has been always deemed a Public Institution for charitable purposes—its spare funds being appropriated by the Directors towards the relief of the most help-

less and unfortunate of the human race ; and, like every other Public Hospital, it was thought entitled to exemption from public assessments.— But it would appear that the officials of the present day, although they have no new law upon the subject, have determined to outstrip their predecessors in vigilance, and, accordingly, all the similar Institutions in the kingdom have also been charged. The Directors of this Institution appealed to the Commissioners on Assessed Taxes, and they are happy to say, their appeal was sustained ; but, as the case has been carried to Exchequer, the final result is not yet known. It is however hoped that, even though it should be found that the existing laws can be so stretched as to subject such Institutions to taxation, it will not be difficult to procure an alteration of them more in consistence with the principles of justice and public utility.

The Directors and Physician shall now, as heretofore, lay before the public some particulars relative to the admissions and cures, &c., which have taken place in the Asylum during the past year.

At the date of last Report, there remained in the Asylum 105 patients—58 males and 47 females. In the course of the year which has since elapsed, there have been admitted 39 patients—19 males and 20 females ; while there have been

dismissed cured 10 males and 6 females ; 5 males and 2 females have been removed by their friends, more or less recovered ; and 5 patients have died ;—thus, leaving in the House at the present date, 116 patients. This result shews, decidedly, that, notwithstanding the many disadvantages under which the Institution has laboured during the past year, it continued to enjoy the confidence of the public ; and while, from its opening to the present hour, the number of patients has gone on gradually increasing, it is highly gratifying to observe that the number of cures has always kept pace with the admissions.

In the treatment of the insane, success much depends on their being placed, at an early period of the malady, under proper management. The Directors and Physician are sorry to observe that this is, in general, too little regarded. All means, and frequently very ill-judged means, are tried without effect, and months permitted to elapse, after mental alienation, before application is made for admission into the Asylum. This must arise partly from a prejudice against Asylums generally, which the improper management of such Institutions in former times originated, and which is not yet entirely uprooted from the public mind. Thus, it often happens that prejudices continue to exist, long after the causes that originated them have been removed ; and, thus, the

very name that was once associated with objects of fear and disrespect, too often carries a degree of obloquy along with it to other objects in every way the reverse.

As the character of Asylums, however, is now altogether different from what it was formerly, and a skilful and humane method of treatment for the insane substituted for the revolting and ineffectual methods that formerly prevailed, it is pleasing to observe that the eyes of the community are opening, more and more, to their utility, and that applications for admission are daily made with less and less reluctance.

It is a curious fact, that, in those countries which have reached the highest state of civilization, and enjoy most freedom, insanity is most prevalent. The causes of this are perhaps sufficiently accounted for in the following abstract from a small work recently published :*

“ In *Scotland*, the proportion of insane is one to five hundred and seventy-four, and, in the *agricultural districts* of England, one to eight hundred and twenty. There is, however, more insanity in *England* than in any other country of Europe.

“ An inquiry, therefore, into the causes of so

* Remarks on the Influence of Mental Cultivation and Mental Excitement upon Health. By AMARIAH BRIGHAM, M.D.

much insanity in this country becomes very important; and these causes must be sought among the agents that act upon the brain. I have already shewn that insanity is a disease of the brain, and that whatever powerfully excites this organ may so derange its action as to produce derangement of the mind. Sometimes it is occasioned by a *blow* or *fall* upon the head; at other times by inflammation or fever, which produces an unusual determination of blood to the brain. But far oftener this disease is occasioned by *moral causes*; by too violent excitement of the mind producing morbid action in some parts of the brain.

“ Thus, we find that insanity prevails most in those countries where people enjoy civil and religious freedom—where every person has liberty to engage in the strife for the highest honours and stations in society—and where the road to wealth and distinction is equally open to all. There is but little insanity in those countries where the government is despotic. The inhabitants of such countries possess but little mental activity, compared with those who live in a republic, or under a representative government. There is but little insanity in China, and travellers state that there is but little in Turkey. The disease is uncommon in Spain, and also in Russia, out of the large cities. In France there is

much less in the country than in the cities.—Humboldt states that he saw very few cases of mental derangement among the American savages. In such countries, the spirit of inquiry and improvement is seldom awakened, or is soon stifled when it is ; and the inhabitants exhibit but little more mental excitement than the brute creation.”

We, thus, see the great necessity that exists in this country for proper places of treatment for the insane ; and that Lunatic Asylums, under judicious management, have every claim to public favour and support. The Directors of this institution flatter themselves that the establishment over which they preside will not yield to any in the kingdom, in the principles on which it is conducted, and the beneficial results that are daily arising from its practical working.

As insanity is generally produced by bodily disease, or undue excitement on the brain, it should ever be remembered that an immediate removal of the patients from the causes of excitement, and proper medical treatment for the body, are absolutely necessary for a speedy and certain recovery. The sooner, therefore, that these unhappy persons are removed from their friends, and from all those objects with which they are familiar, the better : And, hence arises the benefit of proper asylums, where the minds

of the patients may be left to absolute repose, and a salutary restraint, when necessary, put upon their conduct.

The following Table, drawn up by the Physician, shews the cures that have been effected in the house, and the periods during which patients so cured were under treatment :

Months under treatment.	Cures effected.
1	3
2	22
3	27
4	6
5	3
6	14
7	6
8	3
9	11
Above 9 months.	16

This table, also, shews that the cure of insanity is most likely to be effected at an early stage of the *disease*, and that the chances of recovery diminish as the period lengthens from the commencement of treatment, till after nine months have elapsed. The cures thereafter only amount to about one-sixth of the whole.

Cures, however, have been effected after the lapse of a year and a-half—two years—and, in one case, at the end of three years. But this does not alter what is above stated, that the cure is to be expected in the first six months of treatment, and that, after that period, the chance

diminishes. Nevertheless, hope should not, in any case, be entirely given up, as one of the persons cured in the Asylum in nine months had been five years insane before being sent there, and had been during all that time under the best medical treatment in public and private Metropolitan Asylums.

In conclusion, the Directors and Physician have merely to add, that the superintendence of the Asylum has now been devolved on Mr. and Mrs. Walsh, who have been appointed in place of Mr. and Mrs. Simmonds, who, having succeeded to a considerable private fortune, tendered their resignations on the 11th December last, and, from the experience which the Directors and Physician have long had of the character, talents, and accomplishments of their new Superintendent and Matron, whilst filling subordinate situations in the house, they have no doubt that the Institution will prosper under their management. And the Directors have now only to express their sincere thanks to the Physician for the skill and unremitting attention he has displayed during the past year in his treatment of the patients; and to record their approval of the conduct of all the inferior officers and servants of the Institution.

TABLE FIRST.

	Males.	Females.	Total.
Number of Patients remaining in the Asylum on 12th June 1837.....	58	47	105
Number of Patients admitted, from 12th June 1837, to 11th June 1838..	19	20	39

TABLE SECOND.

	Males.	Females.	Total.
Cured from 12th June 1837, to 11th June 1838.....	10	6	16
Removed by their friends.....	5	2	7
Died.....	2	3	5
Remaining 11th June 1838.....	60	56	116